



## AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT, QATAR FOUNDATION, AND QATAR FOUNDATION INTERNATIONAL HOLD FORUM

*Titled 'Arabic Language and Communication Skills in the Twenty-First Century: Perspectives and Approaches'*

**Doha, Qatar, May 19, 2018** – The Arabic and Near Eastern Languages Department and the Department of Education at the American University of Beirut (AUB), in partnership with Qatar Foundation (QF) and Qatar Foundation International (QFI), recently held a forum titled 'Arabic Language and Communication Skills in the 21st Century: Perspectives and Approaches'.

The two-day forum opened on Saturday, May 13, with a session led by AUB professor Mahmoud Al-Batal, followed by Dr. Anies Al-Hroub, Chairperson of the AUB Department of Education, and Maggie Mitchell Salem, Executive Director of QFI. Participants included a number of lecturers who teach Arabic as a first and second language at university, primary, and secondary school levels in a number of Arab and non-Arab countries.

The forum aimed to review and discuss a number of theoretical and practical matters related to teaching communication skills in the curricula of Arabic language taught as a first and second language, and how to establish communication skills as a basis for shaping the curriculum. The forum focused on linking the development of these skills to nurturing the critical and analytical thinking capacities of pupils through academic writing, a key topic of the discussions.

Dr. Al-Hroub said: "The Arabic language suffers from issues that can be briefly summed up as the condescending view of its students, and social problems in which the speakers of foreign and Arab languages are divided into job market-related social and economic classes, and scholastic-pedagogy.

"If we focus on the later issue, we find that teaching Arabic, even in Lebanon, is limited to Arabic language, religious education, and history, while the scientific materials are taught in foreign languages. Thus, there is discriminatory separation between foreign languages and the Arabic language. Foreign languages help pupils to complete studies in science, medicine, and engineering, among others, and reach broader horizons, while the Arabic language is limited to poetry, religious studies, and mythology.

"This initiative marks the beginning of a concerted and important effort by AUB's departments of education and Arabic, in co-operation with QFI and QF, to study and address the challenges and problems faced by students trying to learn and communicate in Arabic at our schools in the Arab world and Lebanon. Our future project is to develop the means and methods of teaching Arabic in public and private schools in Arab countries."



Ms. Salem said: “What really resonated in the discussion was a focus on the purpose of language: why are students learning it, and what will they do with it? This was the first of what will be an ongoing conversation. Partnering with AUB and QF ensures we engage Arabic teachers in the Middle East and beyond. We share a vision to improve how the Arabic language is taught, to accumulate and share knowledge, and to develop Arabic language skills in the future.”

There is a gap that separates many students from Arabic language, and there is a growing sense of alienation towards the language and future relationships professionally and culturally, in addition to a sense of inefficiency and lack of skills in Arabic. This reality results in problems and raises many challenges.

However, the forum is based on the belief that these problems are not intrinsic to the language itself and to its difficulties, nor in its ability to keep up with the times, but in the educational curricula and approaches used in many educational establishments in the Arab world. The forum also stems from the premise that the way to change the current status is to re-engineer curricula and approaches to education, and develop new materials for teaching within the frameworks of communication and its components applied in many modern approaches to teaching languages.

Discussions during the conference focused on a number of key questions, including: ‘What is meant by communication in the context of teaching Arabic and its components and forms?’, ‘What is the relationship of communication to the needs of learners?’, ‘What is its place within the perceptions of teachers, curriculum designers, and parents?’, ‘How to approach the concept of communication within the ‘One Arabic Language’ system, which includes the heritage and contemporary philology and dialects’, ‘How can communication be an essential part of the process of formulating learning outcomes for Arabic courses in all levels of teaching?’, ‘How to reconcile these ‘communicative’ approaches with Arabic approaches and mainstream approaches that focus on grammar and rules’, ‘How can academic writing be used as a tool to develop learners’ analytical and critical thinking?’, and ‘What research and studies are needed as buttress points in the development of communication curricula’?

Some of the aims of the forum included creating the nucleus of a wide network of stakeholders to play an active role in developing communication skills in Arab and non-Arab countries; highlight the importance of communication skills in changing the current status of Arab curricula and establishing a roadmap for the number of practical steps to be taken in the years to come to enhance communication and promote knowledge exchange among professors; and publish a study on the conclusions of the forum that connects professors who did not participate in the discussions of issues. This study will form the basis for future work. The organizers also expressed the hope that the forum will be the first in a series of future events to establish new visions and approaches to teaching and learning Arabic.

Commenting on the forum and the results achieved, Dr. Al-Batal said: “The forum focused on developing communication skills in Arabic language curricula in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It also provided an opportunity to meet within an academic gathering of 60 professors from nine different countries working in the teaching of Arabic at different levels – university, secondary, and preparatory – and in teaching Arabic as a first and second language. The forum dealt with issues pertaining to communication and its relation to the needs



of learners, and ways to make communication an integral part of the process of formulating learning outcomes of Arabic courses in all stages of teaching. It also discussed how to reconcile the 'communicative' approaches to Arabic curricula and mainstream approaches that focus on grammar. It also dealt with the topic of academic writing and methods of employing it as a tool to develop the abilities of learners to think analytically and critically.

"This forum has contributed to the development of awareness among participants that the focus on communication skills can contribute to changing the current status of the Arab curricula," said Dr Al-Batal. "It also laid the foundation to establish a network of stakeholders who are able to enhance the development of communication skills in Arabic, in Arab and non-Arab countries. It is our hope that this forum will be the first in a series of future forums that will establish new visions and approaches to teaching and learning Arabic based on the needs of learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century."

**-ENDS-**

### **Qatar Foundation – Unlocking Human Potential**

Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF) is a non-profit organization that supports Qatar on its journey to becoming a diversified and sustainable economy. QF strives to serve the people of Qatar and beyond by providing specialized programs across its innovation-focused ecosystem of education, science and research, and community development.

QF was founded in 1995 by His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Father Emir, and Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, who shared the vision to provide Qatar with quality education. Today, QF's world-class education system offers lifelong learning opportunities to community members as young as six months through to doctoral level, enabling graduates to thrive in a global environment and contribute to the nation's development.

QF is also creating a multidisciplinary innovation hub in Qatar, where homegrown researchers are working to address local and global challenges. By promoting a culture of lifelong learning and fostering social engagement through programs that embody Qatari culture, QF is committed to empowering the local community and contributing to a better world for all.

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### **About Qatar Foundation International:**



Qatar Foundation International (QFI), LLC, is a U.S.-based member of Qatar Foundation (QF). QFI inspires meaningful connections to the Arab world by creating a global community of diverse learners and educators and connecting them through effective and collaborative learning environments —inside and outside the classroom. Through our activities, QFI is committed to providing K-12 students in Qatar, the Americas, and the United Kingdom (UK) with the intellectual, communicative, and cultural competencies that will enable them to be engaged global citizens. QFI operates as both a grant-making organization, and a convener of thought leaders on issues related to global and international education, open education and education technologies as they intersect with the three core QFI programmatic areas: Arabic language and Arab culture, and Youth Engagement.

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